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ABSTRACT

Narrative observations were made of remedial interchanges occurring among school children (K-4) in open classrooms. Transcripts of interchanges were typed move by move and coded according to a hierarchical coding scheme (remedy, defiance, no response, relief, ending, and ambiguous). The interchanges of the kindergarteners and first graders were examined separately from those of the third and fourth graders in an effort to produce a descriptive grammar that would be capable of generating the move sequence observed at each age. The rule systems of the resulting grammars revealed only minor discrepancies. However, an examination of misses--interchanges not generable by the grammar--proved cogent for a developmental analysis. Furthermore, when all interchanges were parsed according to the grammar, an analysis of frequency of choice of a given move among the grammatical possibilities revealed a number of age differences in selection tendencies. Older children appear as more adversative, and seemingly less mature than younger children. However, by responding to a challenge with a counter-challenge, an older child reveals a readiness to play two roles, a complexity not often seen among young children. More simplistic measures of complexity such as the number of moves per interchange did not change with age. (JB)

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THE DISCOURSE OF MAKING AMENDS:

A GRAMMAR OF REMEDIAL INTERCHANGES

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ABSTRACT

An observational study of remedial interchanges was undertaken with the aim of producing a performance grammar to account for the sequence of moves in this particular domain of social interaction. Remedial interchanges occur when a participant disrupts the normal "flow" of an interaction by doing or saying something inappropriate or awkward. When such missteps occur there are generally-accepted means by which the misdeed can be pointed out and the guilty party can restore comfortable relations. For example, a person can apologize, or offer a justification or excuse. Goffman (1971) discussed these rituals and presented a model or prototypical form. The current research presents a detailed system of rules, a grammar, which can be used to derive the remedial interchanges produced by kindergarten through fourth graders in a naturalistic setting. The grammar is shown to be useful for revealing age-related changes in remedial skills.

THE DISCOURSE OF MAKING AMENDS:

A GRAMMAR OF REMEDIAL INTERCHANGES

Since the publications by Mueller in 1972 and Garvey and Hogan in 1973, demonstrating rather sophisticated conversational sequences in the interchanges of pre-school children, the study of child language has undergone a significant expansion of focus. More and more researchers have begun to study language as an interactive phenomenon, focusing on discourse skills (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Garvey, 1975; Keenan, 1974). A number of workers in the area of discourse analysis as well as students of face-to-face interaction in general have lately been pursuing a goal of developing a 'grammar' of interpersonal behavior; that is, using a linguistic model to discover the rules which underlie smooth interaction (Cicourel, 1970; Duncan and Fiske, 1977; Schegloff, 1968). The present research has attempted to specify a performance grammar for a particular domain of social interaction: a domain which Goffman (1971) called remedial interchanges.

Remedial interchanges usually begin when a participant in an interaction disrupts the normal "flow" of the interaction in some way, for example, by doing or saying something awkward or inappropriate (e.g., stepping on someone's foot, mispronouncing a name, etc.). When such misteps occur there are generally-accepted methods by which the misdeed can be pointed out and the guilty party can restore

comfortable relations. For example, a person can apologize, or can offer a justification or excuse for the behavior. A remedial interchange concludes when the interactants shift their focus away from the misstep in question, turning to other concerns or simply ending their conversation.

Narrative observations were made of 1146 remedial interchanges occurring among school children (kindergarten through fourth grades) in open classrooms. A second observer, present for approximately 25% of the data collection, recorded the same interchanges during the same minute periods 79.3% of the time. Transcripts of these interchanges were typed move by move and coded according to a hierarchical coding scheme. The coding scheme was developed by a systematic procedure which involved several passes through the data and which employed inter-rater agreements as a means of identifying the major types of moves which made up remedial interchanges among the children observed. Seven major move types were identified and formed the constituent parts of the grammar which was developed. Definitions and examples of each type follow. Numbers in parentheses report inter-coder reliability for the category.

> CHALLENGE (chg): Any communicative act which calls into question the appropriateness of another's behavior or in some way questions another's competence or qualifications or good will. (E.g., "That looks like my pencil you're using.") (97.2%)

REMEDY (rem): Any effort by the challenged individual to repair the situation, assure the other participants of his or her good will, willingness to cooperate in the future. (E.g., "Oh, I didn't realize this was your pencil.") (94.5%)

DEFIANCE (def); Any non-cooperative or antisocial response to a challenge. (E.g., "Too bad for you, sucker.") (92.8%)

NO RESPONSE (n.r.): A failure to make any observable verbal or non-verbal response when challenged. (100%)

RELIEF (rel): Any acceptance of the remedy by the challenger or one of the other participants in the interchange. (E.g., "That's OK. I understand.") (90.9%)

ENDING (end): Any effort to terminate the interchange without providing an acceptance or rejection of the remedy. (E.g., "Oh, never mind.") (91.7%)

AMBIGUOUS (amb): Non-verbal behaviors of unclear meaning in the interchange. (E.g., sighing, laughing, directing gaze) (83.3%)

The interchanges of the kindergarten-first graders and third-fourth graders were examined separately in an effort to produce a descriptive grammar which would be capable of generating the move sequence observed at each age. The procedures used to develop these grammars involved examining the distributional privileges of the seven units identified above as constituent parts. Move-to-move transitions within the data were examined and notes were made of which move types occurred in response to which other types. Charts were constructed indicating the frequency of each pattern or sequence of moves in the data sampled. The information in these charts was used to produced a system of rewrite rules for

each of the two age levels. Examination of the two rule systems revealed only very minor differences between them: the same grammar could be used to generate a large proportion of the interchange of both age groups. The grammar presented in Table 1 describes and is capable of generating 93.1% of the interchanges observed among kindergarten-first graders and 94.4% of those observed in third-fourth grade classes.

Examining Table 1, we see that each of the rewrite rules accounts for the sequence of possible moves within a single turn and the transition to the next person's turn. The higher order constituents, C, R, X and Y, indicate four functionally different groupings of move types. Move types within a grouping were functionally similar in that they were elicited by a given set of move types, and that they elicited a specific set of other move types. The constituent C indicates turns which contained a challenge; R indicates turns which contained a remedy. Constituents X and Y group various other move types which shared the same privileges of occurrence, but contained no single necessary component move type. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate how the grammar of Table 1 parses two example interchanges.

Once a descriptive tool like the grammar presented in Table 1 has been developed, there are a number of interesting ways it can be used to reveal age difference in remedial skills and to reveal differences related to the presence or absence of adult participants a few of these will be discussed below.

TABLE 1

A PERFORMANCE GRAMMAR OF REMEDIAL INTERCHANGES

1. $\text{Interchange} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{matrix} C_A \\ R_B \end{matrix} + \left\{ \begin{matrix} Y_A \\ C_A \end{matrix} \right\} \right\}$

2a. $C_A \rightarrow chg_A + \left[\begin{matrix} end_A \\ amb_A \\ rlf_A \end{matrix} \right] + \left\{ \begin{matrix} C_B \\ R_B \\ X_B \end{matrix} \right\}$

2b. $C_B \rightarrow chg_B + \left[\begin{matrix} def_B \\ end_B \end{matrix} \right] + \left\{ \begin{matrix} C_A \\ R_A \\ X_A \end{matrix} \right\}$

3a. $R_A \rightarrow rem_A + \left[C_A \right] + \left[\begin{matrix} C_B \\ end_B \end{matrix} \right]$

3b. $R_B \rightarrow rem_B + \left[\begin{matrix} C_B \\ X_B \end{matrix} \right] + \left[\begin{matrix} C_A \\ Y_A \end{matrix} \right]$

4a. $X_A \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{matrix} def_A \\ end_A \\ amb_A \\ n.r._a \end{matrix} \right\} + \left[C_B \right]$

4b. $X_B \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{matrix} def_B \\ end_B \\ amb_B \\ n.r._B \end{matrix} \right\} + \left[\begin{matrix} C_A \\ Y_A \end{matrix} \right]$

5a. $Y_A \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{matrix} rlf_A / rem_B + \sim (def_B \vee C_B) \\ end_A \\ amb_A \end{matrix} \right\}$

Subscripts indicate the speaker's role, with A being the first challenger, B the person challenged by the first challenger. Brackets indicate optional choices; braces indicate obligatory choices. Slashes indicate context dependencies. The terminal nodes symbolize the major move types: chg = challenge, rem = remedy, def = defiance, n.r. = no response, end = non-relief endings, amb = ambiguous moves, rlf = reliefs.

First, it was interesting to look at the misses -- those interchanges which could not be generated by the grammar. This was particularly interesting for a developmental analysis. For example, the largest single group of misses deviated from the rule system in the placement of a relief move. An example of such an ungrammatical interchange is the following:

Tammy to Daryl: It's not polite to burp out loud.

Daryl: So what?

Tammy: Well, you're excused.

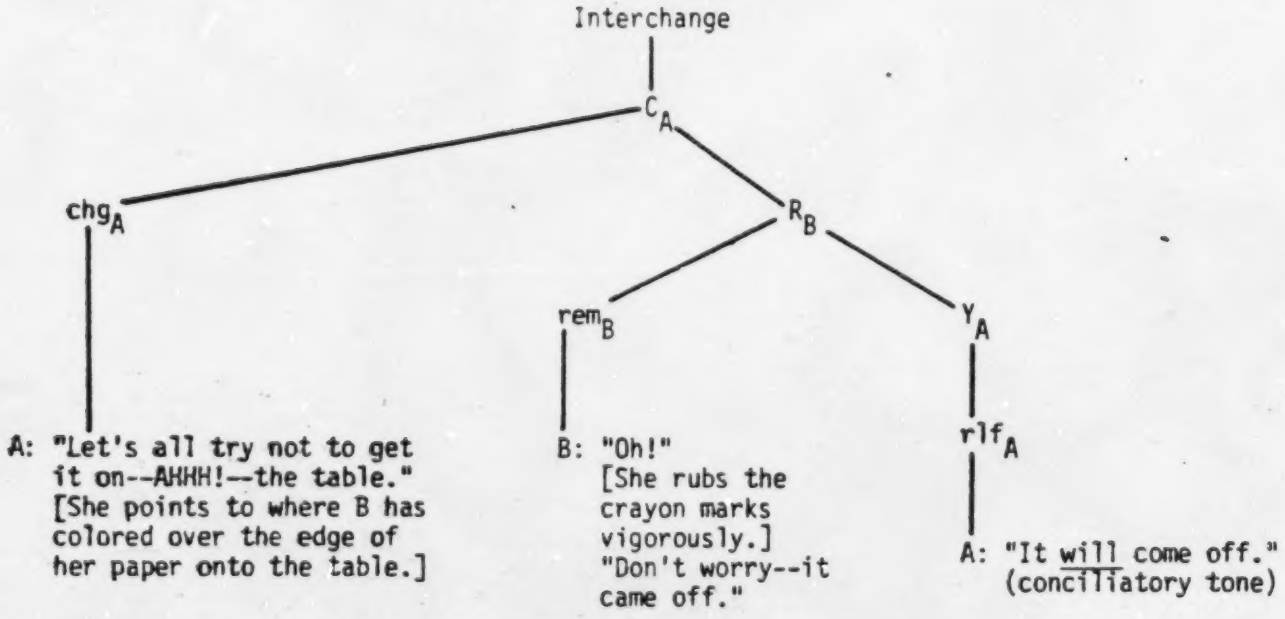
Tammy's challenge was followed by a defiant move ("So what?"), which Tammy responded to with a relief. The grammar does not allow reliefs in response to defiance. Thirty percent of the misses observed involved relief placement and sixty-seven percent of these occurred among the youngest children. This is an example of how the use of a descriptive grammar can point out specifically what is changing with development in a domain of discourse. Interestingly, a simple frequency analysis did not reveal any age-related changes in the use of the relief move.

Once all of the interchanges were parsed according to this grammar, a number of interesting questions presented themselves--questions which could be answered with more traditional types of analysis. For instance, according to rule 2a of the grammar, B must do one of three things in response to a challenge: counter-challenge, give a remedy, or give a move from constituent X. For

FIGURE 1

STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM OF A REMEDIAL INTERCHANGE

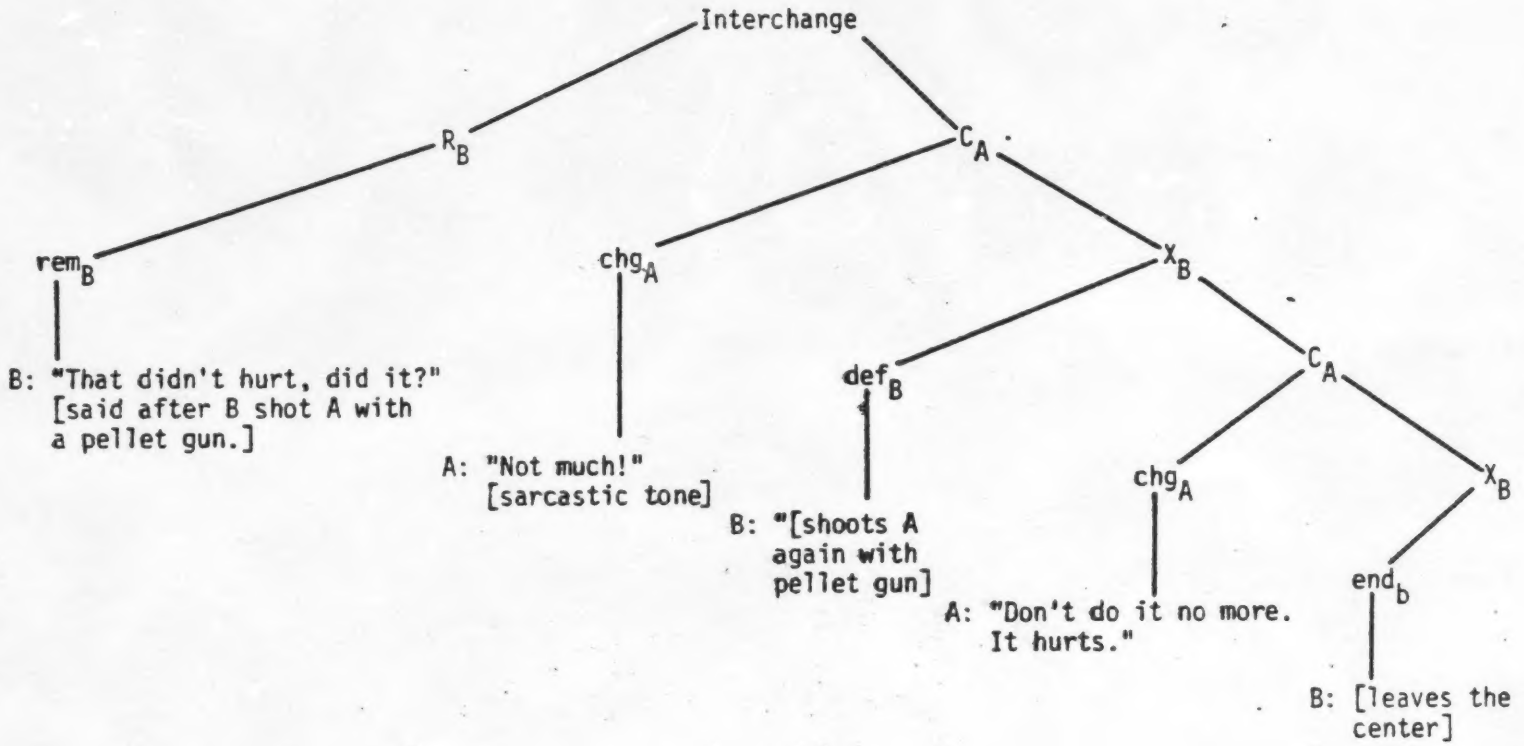
WHERE I → C_A


Interchange
C_A
chg_A
R_B
rem_B
Y_A
rlf_A
A: "Let's all try not to get it on--AHHH!--the table." [She points to where B has colored over the edge of her paper onto the table.]
B: "Oh!" [She rubs the crayon marks vigorously.] "Don't worry--it came off."
A: "It will come off." (conciliatory tone)

Note. This interchange was observed in a third-fourth grade class in the art center.

FIGURE 2

STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM OF A REMEDIAL INTERCHANGE
WHERE I → R_B + C_A



Note. This interchange was observed in a third-fourth grade classroom in a general work area.

each rule a chi-square analysis was performed on the frequencies of each choice. These analyses revealed a number of age differences in selection tendencies. For example, older children were more likely to respond to a challenge with a counter-challenge in the above situation (X^2 (2) = 8.89, $p < .013$).

The above finding paints a picture of older children as more adversative, and seemingly less mature than the younger children. (Indeed, there were other findings consistent with the interpretation that the 8 and 9 year olds were more adversative). But this way of looking at remedial interchange reveals a particular kind of complexity in the interchanges of the older children. By responding to a challenge with a counter-challenge, a participant in a remedial interchange commits him or herself to playing two roles-that of defendent and that of challenger. The interchange comes to be involved with settling two alleged missteps rather than one, and both participants are obliged to switch back and forth between the two roles. This kind of complexity was not seen as often among the younger children. So although these exchanges may look less mature, in the sense of being less socially graceful, they do require more flexibility and are more mature in the sense of being more complex. Interestingly again, more simplistic measures of complexity such as the number of moves or turns per interchange, or the number of participants per interchange did not change with age.

The grammar in Table 1 is really quite primitive, compared to all the complexities that could be introduced to account for more and more aspects of this very small domain of interaction. For example, I have worked extensively on a hierarchical classification of remedies, and I am now working on classifying challenges. Clearly, certain types of challenges will select certain types of remedies, which of course will add considerable complexity to the rule system.

What I have tried to show today, is that even at a relatively simple level of analysis, this way of looking at social interaction by developing descriptive grammars can be a very fruitful way to analyze developing discourse skills.

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